

# Indiana House of Representatives

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## News and Information

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### **STATE REP. TRENT VAN HAAFTEN'S STATEHOUSE REPORT**

INDIANAPOLIS – If people you care about were in the path of a runaway train, would you do what you could to protect those folks?

That was the question that I, along with all House Democrats, faced at the midway point of this session. The runaway train was the House Republican agenda to cut funding for education, increase property taxes and reduce health care for those that needed help the most.

As this train continued to bear down on all Hoosiers, House Democrats took the necessary steps to slow the train down. Based upon the events of this past week, I am encouraged that our efforts may cause those in charge to at least listen to the voices of all Hoosiers. Only time will tell if these concerns will be heard.

In the first half of this session, we have seen an unprecedented assault on public education by those now leading state government. Much has been said about the school funding formula that, if implemented, will devastate many Indiana school systems, including Mt. Vernon, North Posey, New Harmony and Evansville. The proposed cuts to education are the main reason why I voted against the budget bill (HB 1001).

Our local school administrators have helped clarify the impact of HB 1001 by telling the public about the choices that will have to be made in increasing class size, eliminating programs and possibly closing buildings. I am grateful that so many of you have contacted me with your concerns for your children's education. I hope that those of you concerned for public education will help put a face to the problem by continuing to contact members of the House majority who are intent upon making these cuts.

Education cuts are not the only concern about HB 1001. An increased property tax burden is also inherent in the proposed budget because it caps the sales tax money that local governments receive from the state to limit property tax increases. Without providing other funding sources for property tax relief, local governments will have to cut essential services like public safety and road repairs or raise property taxes. Some estimates suggest the proposed budget will require at least \$300 million in property tax increases across the state.

Only time will tell if the runaway train of education cuts and increased property taxes can be stopped or even slowed down. However, there were some encouraging signs this past week that our concerns are being heard.

The Inspector General bill is a topic that I have been involved with since it was first proposed by the Governor. This bill has sparked controversy because it seeks to give prosecutorial powers to a person appointed by the Governor. These are powers reserved exclusively for our elected prosecutors by both our constitution and statutory law. We should all be concerned when we chip away at these powers and rights. If we allow such "chipping away," we may wake up one day with no distinct powers or rights in our constitution.

When the Inspector General bill was presented in committee last Thursday, I discussed a change to the method of determining the IG's powers. This discussion led to my first meeting with our new Governor later in the day. After small talk about our mutual enjoyment of riding Harleys, I had a very frank and open discussion with the Governor about the IG bill.

Although there has been no resolution to the IG bill at the time I write this, I am pleased that the Governor's office

and the majority have started to open the lines of communication with members of the minority party.

In the second half of the session, we are now considering those bills passed by the Senate. The Senate is also busy in considering the 117 House bills that we passed. This means that there are two sets of committee hearings to attend and two sets of bills that can serve as homes for language and concepts that legislators want to keep alive.

Leaders already have said they want to revive 40 measures that did not survive last week's deadlines in the House. I would like to see many of these concepts return to life as long as they will be the subject of honest debate and compromise. This appears to be occurring on the IG bill, so the second half looks promising.

One measure that is moving forward is the Methamphetamine bill. The majority of language from House Bill 1685 (the Meth bill I filed early in the session) was amended into Senate Bill 444 last week in the House Courts and Criminal Code committee. There is a strong bipartisan effort in the House to address the meth problem. As I have said many times before, meth is not a Democrat or a Republican problem, it is a Hoosier problem. Governing is much more rewarding when politics is put to the side, and people come together to work.

I look forward to hearing from you during the remainder of the session. I would also like to apologize for being absent from the legislative forum in Evansville this past weekend. I wanted to attend my six-year old nephew's birthday party. There does come a time in this job when you have to put family first. Additional legislative forums are scheduled in New Harmony on April 2 and in Evansville on April 2 and 23.

Until then, if you want to talk to me about anything taking place at the Indiana General Assembly, please call me on the toll-free Statehouse telephone number of 1-800-382-9842, e-mail me through my Internet Web site at [www.IN.gov/H76](http://www.IN.gov/H76) or write to me in care of the Indiana House of Representatives, 200 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.

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